



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, John F. Scott, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter.

Tuesday, October 2, 2007

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Sheets

Members Absent: Councilor Bond, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Scott and Councilor Streeter

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

None.

4. Approval of Minutes

2007-0232 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of September 11, 2007 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. NEW BUSINESS

2007-0072 Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief - Update

Discussed

Mayor Watson thanked the Committee for its service. Maryellen French, Vice Chairman, read a statement, thanking Secretary George Reed for his service to the Committee. Mr. Reed introduced the remaining members of the committee in attendance and reviewed a PowerPoint presentation. He noted that the Committee's report was approved by a majority vote, and contains four general recommendations and 36 detailed recommendations. There are also a number of appendices and attachments including minutes of the Committee's meetings.

Councilors Scott, Streeter, and Schmidt arrived at 6:06 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Scott, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter
Members Absent: Councilor Bond

Discussed

Mr. Reed noted the topics to be reviewed as follows: Committee Task, Committee Deliberations Perspective, Program Fiscal Effect, Qualification of Applicant, Relief Provided for Qualified Applicant, Applicant Obligations, Other Towns' Programs, and a Summary.

Connecticut General Statutes allow for an optional tax relief program, require the establishment of a committee to study and investigate a program, and require a report from the committee. The Citizens Committee on Property Tax Relief proceeded conservatively given the lack of demographic data needed to predict the costs and benefits of the program. The Committee also chose to cap the total program relief and provide for recovery of the costs over time.

Councilor Bond arrived at 6:11 p.m.

Roll Call: Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Scott, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter

Discussed

The Committee chose to provide relief to elderly and disabled persons impacted by tax increases resulting from escalating values and the shifting tax burden associated with the revaluation. The Committee focused on the applicant, not the heirs, in the hope of avoiding foreclosures and preserving capital gain. Mr. Reed noted that statutes allow the program to be amended by the Town as experience is gained.

The Committee recommends a maximum annual appropriation equal to 1% of the real property tax assessed in the preceding year. The minimum would be set at the Town's discretion, based on budgetary restrictions.

Recommended applicant qualifications are residing in the property for at least five years before the tax relief; maximum qualifying income of \$53,800 single or \$60,300 married; no unresolved tax delinquencies; age requirements (65 years or older, surviving spouse 60 years of age or older, or under age 65 and permanently disabled); and determination of qualification by Tax Assessor.

Under the program, the tax base of qualified applicants would be frozen at the level preceding acceptance into the program or the current year's tax, whichever is less. The relief could not be granted retroactively. Relief would be prorated if it exceeded the program appropriation in a given year. Relief would also be prorated if the property is in the name of the applicant and any person other than a spouse. Total relief from all programs cannot exceed the property value nor can it exceed the amount of tax which would otherwise be levied. This program does not affect an applicant's ability to receive relief under other programs.

The program would require applicants to file applications annually between February 1 and May 15 and agree to liens on the property at an interest rate established by the Town. Applications would be processed by Town staff, with appeals made to the Town Council.

The Committee reviewed other towns' programs and how they were implemented, and reviewed demographic data for comparison purposes with Groton.

Mr. Reed summarized his presentation.

Councilor Bond thanked the Committee. She asked if any members of the public spoke to the Committee, and Mr. Reed noted public comments are included in the report. He summarized the comments. Councilor Bond asked if the Committee researched the time limit for residency and Mr. Reed stated that statutes require a minimum of one year, but they do not restrict longer time periods. Councilor Bond asked if consideration was given to deducting medical expenses from qualifying income. Ms. French noted that this program is based on federal taxes and medical expenses can be deducted from federal taxes. Mr. Reed noted the Committee had not specifically discussed that issue.

Town Manager Oefinger noted that the lien consists of the tax, the interest, and a lien fee that is currently \$24.00. The fee would be assessed every year that the applicant applies.

Mr. Reed reviewed income inclusions and exclusions as noted in the report.

Councilor Scott asked about privacy protection under this program. Mr. Reed noted the Poor and Unable to Pay Program requires applicants to come before the Town Council and that may be a deterrent. This application process would be similar to existing programs where applicants work with Town staff.

Councilor Sheets yielded the floor to Edward McKay of 981 Groton Long Point Road who read a prepared statement in support of the 8% program currently in place.

Councilor O'Beirne noted that the Council will determine what the income limits/ requirements are. He stated that relief offered under this program is relatively small and will remain so until the next revaluation year (2011) since the track record of the Town Council over the last 10 years is a stable mill rate between revaluations.

Mayor Watson asked if fire district taxes are included in this program. Mr. Reed noted that the Committee only looked at Town taxes.

Councilor Streeter commended the Committee on completing its work in such a short period of time and he asked if the Committee would be willing to provide further guidance if necessary. Mr. Reed stated yes.

Mr. Reed noted that two Committee members voted against or abstained and their reasons are noted in the report.

2007-0220

Resolution Approving Amount of Bonds to be Issued in 2008

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted there will be a bond sale on October 24th. Sal Pandolfo noted this is the second of the three bond issues on the schools and bond indebtedness has already been incorporated into the budget. This bond sale represents the last borrowing on Pleasant Valley Road South, the three school projects, and the Fort Hill Homes sewer project. Mr. Pandolfo reviewed anticipated interest on the bonds.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0226

Pfizer Community Affairs Group Grant

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0227

Department of Homeland Security Grant - Portable Video Surveillance Equipment

A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., seconded by Councilor Bond, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2007-0234

Department of Education Youth Services Enhancement Grant

A motion was made by Councilor Schmidt, seconded by Councilor Scott, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

6. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Scott, seconded by Councilor Bond, to adjourn the meeting at 7:07 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.